LONDON IMPRESSIONS

ETCHINGS AND PICTURES
IN PHOTOGRAVURE BY
WILLIAM HYDE
AND ESSAYS BY
ALICE MEYNELL

No 213
Authors

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WESTMINSTER

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A Cheap Market

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THE LONDON SUNDAY

This seems to be a thing that all exclaim against, and but few see. The phrase is never varied—a sure sign of lack of experience. One cries, 'Oh, the London Sunday!' and another, 'It must be too dreadful for foreigners!' and before the topic disappears something yet vaguer has been said, in a flickering manner, as to the Boulevards. But in fact London Sunday is little understood even by those who know its aspect, and the greater number do not know even so much.

Obviously, it is one thing in the summer of livelong sunshine, and another thing in winter. When the tops of the steeples fly a blue and white sky as far as the eye may see—a broad flag for the streets, and a narrow, wavering pennon for the alleys; when the reluctant faces of grey houses are compelled by the fires of the day to bandy reflections with the grey houses opposite; when the sun himself is lodged in every window, so that the town multiplies his very face, and sets up suns to the west in the morning and to the east in the evening—suns in rows, and suns that run fluctuating along the windows of a long, unequal street; when the plane-tree is fresh and the leaf of the elm already dry, the London Sunday, from beginning to end, is passed by the London people out of doors. For this reason it is difficult to understand it; you cannot tell whither these streams of people are bound. They all have the gait of making for some end; they do not stroll, and there is doubtless some excursion afoot. The number of young men, in proportion to the numbers of older men, of women, girls, and children, is curious, especially in the further east. They go in great straggling gangs, and though they do nothing—not even much talking—they give a false air of lawlessness to the streaming street. They are the ugliest of all the populace, their clothing, besides, being the most dull and indescribable, and their bearing indefinitely defiant. The men of other kinds and ages, and the women, who needs must

A Forgotten Corner

balance such a horde of men of twenty, seem to spend less of their Sunday on the road, and you may see them, accordingly, in great numbers in the open spaces—the vague lands on the other side of Clapton, for instance. Very few people of any kind seem to be within their houses in the free afternoon.

In spite of the length of London, you may pass from the furthest west to the extreme east, and from the last country field to the first, so quickly as to get a continuous Sunday impression—the day and the people flowing, unfolding, and closing, from suburb to remote suburb, through 'town,' through the City, through the east, and to the verge of breathless and unfragrant meadows, divided by a league-long tramway line lost in the distances of Epping, whither the smoke, from which a south-west wind has set all London radiantly free, is trailing a broken wing.

Even in the centre of the City it cannot be said that the main streets are deserted; for they evidently are all thoroughfares towards the unknown places to which these thousands and thousands of crossing feet are bent. But the secondary streets are swept and vacant; and the effect of the absence of people is to turn the whole picture pale. The asphaltic streets are almost white, and in this light-grey London, colourless but clear, you realise how much man darkens and blackens the earth in these latitudes by his mere presence. The natural surface of the world, it seems, is rather blond than dark; the quarry is white, and the harvest bright; with which agrees the delicate, high, and sensitive soft colour of the body. It is a pity that mere black, brown, and grey dyes should so change the colour of the race—squalid dyes, in which are steeped the unchanged and the unwashed garments of these quite innumerable young men. It may be noted that the great majority of the London Sunday women are fresh to see. We all know that there are alleys and corners where the women look otherwise, but those who take their part in this Sunday, so famous in allusions, who join in the day-long movement on foot and load the tramcars, are clean and cleanly clad. In Shoreditch and along the out-stretching Kingsland Road the all-brilliant sun strikes flashes from white dresses and gilds fair hair attractively arranged. This is one of the surprises of the journey.

Another surprise is that you fall in love with the City steeples, and find it dull to pass out of their influence of serenity and fancy to come amongst the Gothic towers and spires of the suburbs. These last are studious and consistent, properly retrospective, and full of principle and history. Moreover, they are well seen, for they stand in the wide dwarf town, with nothing of their own measure except the Board Schools. All the shabbier suburbs are dwarfs, and none drop so suddenly and go so near the ground as the suburbs of the north-east. But there are too many Gothic towers; whereas of the lovely spires of Wren and of his followers we shall have no more. No one, it seems, plots to recapture that signal inspiration, so delicate, so inventive, so full of dignity and freaks. Nothing is quite so beautiful as the spire of Bow, but it must be permitted to admire a slender steeple in Shoreditch, and one close to the Blue-Coat

WESTMINSTER ABBEY.

WESTMINSTER ABBEY

School, the much less ingenious one by the Post Office, even the prankish one near the Mansion House, besides the beautiful St. Mary's in the Strand, and the only less charming St. Clement Danes. And all these lily-like spires have kept, more or less, their paleness in the smirched and spotted town. They are fine against all the London skies, and never more beautiful than with a bright grey sky, and the half-sunshine of a characteristic London day on their happy little cupolas and small and exquisite columns, except, perhaps, when a westering sun makes their white a golden rose. St. Botolph's, Bishopsgate, has but a squat spire, set with flourishing little urns; but it has many trees tossing in the summer wind, and in its garden a fountain where the pigeons and sparrows bathe together. Across the geraniums and lobelias of another quadrangle, full of sun and translucent shadow, you may see the gold of the altar-lights, and white surplices gilded with that gold. The tradition—a Dickens tradition, it seems—of the desolate City church is still true as to the numbers of the congregations: in this open church there are but three people, exceedingly devout; but the old woman, the beadle, the gloom are gone.

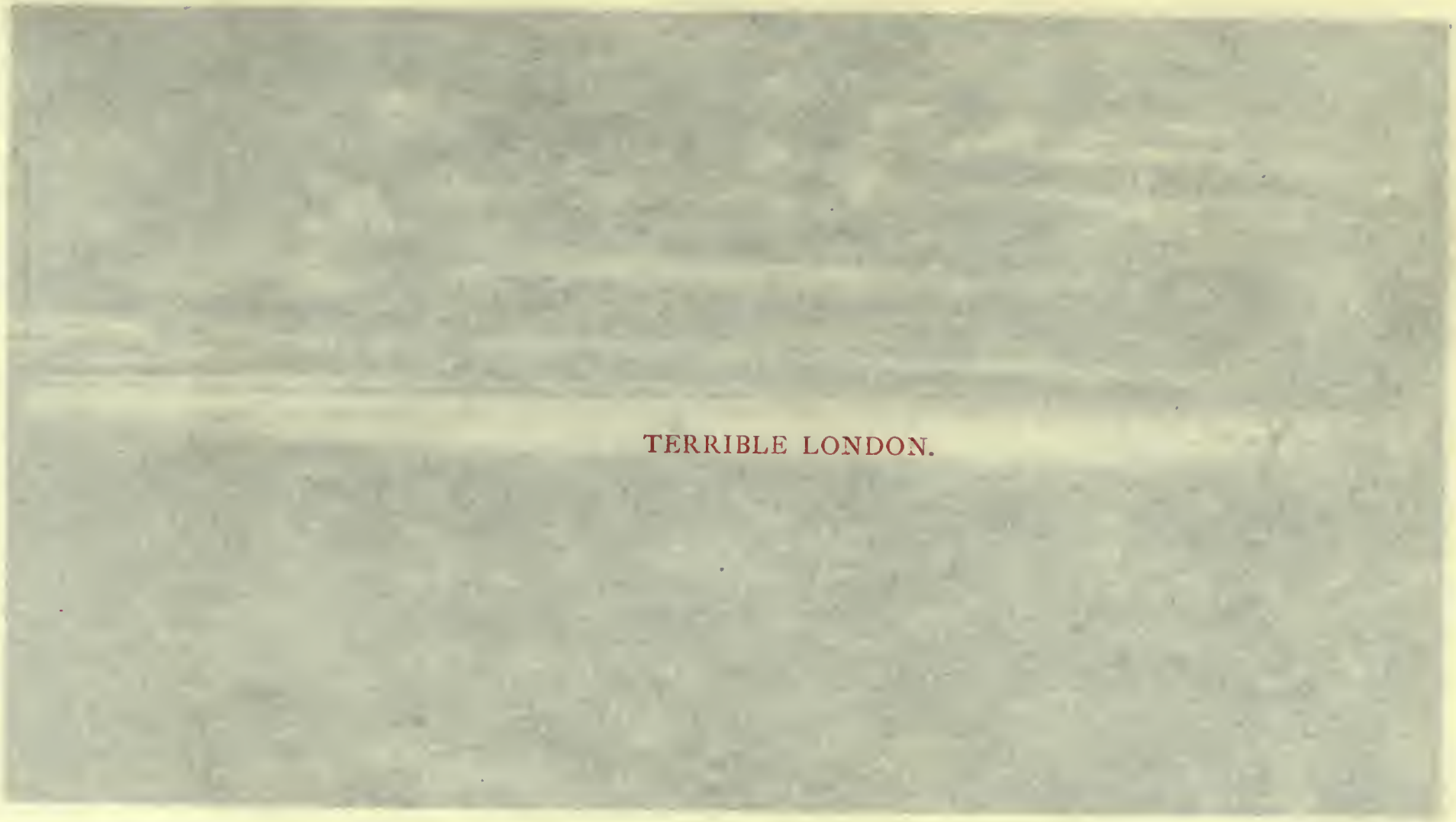
There is one respect in which Sunday flatters the town. It fills with iron blinds and shutters the hollows of the shops whereby London usually looks as though the houses found a kind of helpless security in their long, staggering, lateral union, a prop for houses that have lost their feet. Again, it helps the summer to put out many fires, and helps the live wind to sift the darkness from the sunlight.

A PILGRIM

Now and then a firefly strays from the vineyard into the streets of an Italian city, and goes quenched in the light of the shops. The stray and waif from 'the very country' that comes to London is a silver-white seed with silken spokes or sails. There is no depth of the deep town that this visitant does not penetrate in August—going in, going far, going through, by virtue of its indescribable gentleness. The firefly has only a wall to cross, but the shining seed comes a long way, a careless alien but a mighty traveller. Indestructibly fragile, the most delicate of all the visible signs of the breeze, it goes to town, makes light of the capital, sets at nought the thoroughfares and the omnibuses, especially flouts the Park, one may suppose, where it does not grow. It hovers and leaps at about the height of first-floor windows, by many a mile of dull drawing-rooms, a country creature quite unconverted to London and undismayed. This *flâneur* makes as little of our London as his ancestor made of Chaucer's.

Sometimes it takes a flight on a stronger wind, and its whiteness shows dark with slight shadow against bright clouds, as the whiter snow-flake also looks dark from its shadow side. Then it comes down in a tumult of flight upon the city. It is a very strong little seed-pod, set with arms, legs, or sails—so ingeniously set that though all grow from the top of the pod their points together make a globe; on these it turns a 'cart-wheel' like a human boy—like many boys, in fact, it must overtake on its way through the less respectable of the suburbs—only better. Every limb, itself so fine, is feathered with little plumes that are as thin as autumn spider-webs. Nothing steps so delicately as that seed, or upon such extreme tiptoe. But it does not walk far; the air bears the charges of the wild journey.

Thistle-seeds—if thistle-seeds they be—make few and brief halts, then roll their wheel on the stones for a while, and then the wheel is a-wing again. You encounter them in the country, setting out for town on a south wind, and in London there is not a street they do not recklessly stray along. For they use our arbitrary streets; it does not seem that they make a bee-line over the top of the houses, and cross London thus. They use the streets which they treat so lightly. They conform, for the time, to human courses, and stroll down Bond Street and turn up Piccadilly, and go to the Bank on a long west wind—their strolling being done at a certain height, in moderate mid-air.



TERRIBLE LONDON.

LIBRE TOZABOY

They generally travel wildly alone, but now and then you shall see two of them, as you see butterflies go in couples, flitting at leisure at Charing Cross. The extreme ends of their tender plumes have touched and have lightly caught each other. But singly they go by all day, with long rises and long descents as the breeze may sigh, or more quickly on a high level way of theirs. Nothing wilder comes to town—not even the scent of hay on morning winds at market-time in June; for the hay is for cab-horses, and it is at home in the clattering mews, and has a London habit of its own.

White meteor, lost star, bright as a cloud, the seed has many images of its radiant flight. But there is only one thing really like it—the point of light caught by a diamond, with the regular surrounding rays.

THE EFFECT OF LONDON

It is no wonder if the painters of London are somewhat eager for the help of smoke. A simple glance at the streets—and the glance that would appreciate so mingled a sight as that of London must be simple—shows you that the detail of our streets is the closest detail in the world. Nowhere else do the houses, the carriages, and the people, all alike, wear the minute spots of hard colour that make a London street by bright daylight look so sharp and small. In cities abroad, for instance, you find some blank spaces of wall on the fronts of the houses, narrow spaces in the north, but wider and wider as you go south. In other cities is here and there a closing of the eyelids with a smoothing of the faces of the streets; here alone the unshuttered windows are set close together; the street glances and chatters with the false vivacity of these perpetual windows. Shops and windows run into rows all but touching one another, or what interval there might have been betwixt is, by the care of architects, in some manner harassed and beset.

The Nerves of London.

Add to this the black garments of the crowd, which make every man conspicuous in the light, and the abrupt and minute patches of white—exceedingly pure white of sharp shapes and angles—scattered throughout the drifting and intercrossing multitude. The white of a footman's shirt, the white of the collars of innumerable men, the white letters of advertisements, the white of the label at the back of cabs and hansoms, and many and many another little square, triangle, and line of white, are visible to the utmost distances. They have an emphasis that is never softened; nothing,

AN IMPRESSION.

LIBRARY

except snow, could be whiter; and nothing, perhaps, makes so salient a part of the enormous fragmentariness of the street view.

There might be as much detail in some other scenes, but that they have not these shreds and patches of black and white. Of all landscape, for instance, that of the small culture of Italy and of parts of the East is, perhaps, the most minute. A little rill of vine is crossed by a short patch of corn, and among all the sprinkled foliage of fruit-trees, the olive, with the smallest leaf of all, is the most constant. There is no liberty, and your sight is taken in a net of green crops; it is trapped on the ground by tendrils of cucumber, and cannot rise because of maize and beans, nor can it fly for branches. No tract of grass is wide enough to make a space of quiet green, and the eyes are kept busy by delicate things in perpetual interchange. It is not the multitude of a wide clover-field, where one stroke of the breeze turns a million little faces of flowers eastwards, for there is hardly any repetition, but an unending obstruction. Nor can you see anything that is quite simple, unless, pushing aside a branch of fig-tree with this hand, and a bough of peach with that, you lift your eyes to the indescribable simplicity of the distance of mountains.

Or there is infinite detail in a Thames-side bank of woods between Maidenhead and Cookham, when all the leaves are out, and all still young—the characteristic local green of beech, alder, poplar, and ash, all still unlike each other and undarkened; every separate leaf faced with colour and light, and backed by mystery and shadow. But yet neither this nor anything else in nature shows the innumerable minuteness of London in the sun. The summer sun sends a peremptory summons to every patch of omnibus, red or blue, to every scrap of harness, to all the broken, inconsequent accents, all equal, all divided, and all leaping to light.

In regard to movement, the scenery of the streets has no likeness to anything in nature. Clouds wing one way, streams flow, trees toss, thrill, and remain, but the crowd moves all ways without ever changing its spots, its dull violence of colour and contrast. Summer and day make the streets impossible for the painter. But the summer of London is most local and characteristic—not only in the west, when the scent of mignonette and the recurrent click of the bearing-rein and bit where carriages stand waiting are the very signs of town; summer at the Bank, summer that gives to the walls of Lombard Street a faint hint of reflected light, and fills at a glance ten thousand serried windows with the images of the sun. If there is everywhere a lack of spirit and sweetness, it is only that sunshine, with every tree and every flower, is converted to London and turns a Londoner.

But such charm as there may still be in the touches of the sun are perceptible rather in the few streets that keep their ancient narrowness. Here there is precisely the possibility of that inter-reflection of sunshine and warm light, from house to facing house, which in its gentle splendour is the chief loveliness of summer in southern cities, where walls are here and there blank, and tenderly coloured. Reflected light is the

beauty of shadows, and really one may see a shadow faintly so transformed in the course of the delicate curves of City streets. Such curves are not in the wider streets; they are beautiful, apart from the chances and changes of light which they foster, and many a narrow street leading to the right and to the left out of Cheapside, or some other of the central London ways, takes curves as subtle as those of a swimming fish's tail. Otherwise London curves are distressingly ugly and dreary—those of a crescent, for example. But as much as the crescent offends, the light wave of a fish's-tail street pleases the eye, with its fine deflections. A wave of this kind is frequent enough in villages, but a certain height in the houses gives it all its character in London.

Some of these alleys, on one side at least, have also the charm, which is the rarest thing in town, of a certain steepness in incline. They dip as they waver, with a motion that tells of a direction towards water. Whether in village or town there is sea or river, a hidden Mediterranean or a hidden Thames, at the level to which the sway and swing of the path will settle. And throughout London the direction of streets seems to be a rather secret thing, and misleading—the sign of a town that has not been ordered as a machine is ordered, but has felt its way like an organism. Slight tendencies, convergences, divergences, lead the streets wandering and draw lines long astray. Old and forgotten causes have brought to pass the slight misgoing that first takes the streets apart—old rights or the accidents of private liberty; and what these began the chances of sequence have ended, a mile astray. Doubtless, besides, the swing of the river has tended to set streets a-flowing too.

But the downward fluctuation of little City streets towards the water is a briefer thing, and as full of drawing as the upper line of a flexible fan foreshortened. The long straying streets are too vague for drawing. In these City lanes, too, there is some rest for the eyes from the infinite detail of the street, and even from the tyranny of windows. Only in their warehouses are to be found spaces of plain wall, but unluckily the plain wall is also black.

END OF A WINTER DAY.

The Embankment at Night.

THE CLIMATE OF SMOKE

It is some little treason to a natural storm to admire too eagerly the mimic wrack and menace of the paltry tempest of the smoke. Only by acknowledging the climate of London to be more than half an artificial climate, and by treating our own handiwork—the sky of our manufacture—with a relative contempt, are we excused for thinking the effects in any sense beautiful. Let us avoid serious words of description. The whirls of floating smoke that darken the sunset are 'lurid' to no very grand purpose; and the threat from even twice as many kitchen fires never would be terrible. It is a tale signifying nothing. Let us grant that there is now and then an effect of handsome grime, but there is no system in this scenery of smoke. What form seems at times to declare itself is bestowed by the light. The sun rules from a centre, whatever the circumference be made of—mist from mountain heights or vapour from that series of successive fleeting solitudes, the ocean, or refuse from a million fireplaces; and from this reigning centre his rays seem to compel a kind of organism. There is no chance-medley where he rules, because of his long, distributed lights, and straight, infallible, divergent shadows that pick off the points and pinnacles of a thousand distances. The lowering sun will not permit the smoke to show so shapeless, so lifeless, so unbounded as it is; he takes his place in the middle of a wheel, and commands at any rate a mechanical order.

Otherwise, and without a sun lowered into your picture, the smoke-mingled sky is the most unplanned in the world. It has no confederacy, and no direction. Nothing leads, and there are no figures, no troops, no companies; there is no history, nor approach. The smoke is helpless. It is perpetually subject to gravitation; no wind makes it buoyant, and no electric impetus lifts it against a wind. It constantly and

drearily drops, as you may see if you look against any London horizon; the minute shower that it carries never ceases and never lifts, but sifts down momently from the low sky into which the chimneys raised it at first. That one upward spring was all its life. Thenceforth it does but drift until it is all shed, to the last black atom, upon the face of the town.

And yet you may, twenty times a day in London, hear the smoke called cloud. Thunderstorms are announced as lurking in the heart of the powerless bosom of the smoke, and showers are threatened where there never was anything so fresh as a drop of rain. The puny darkness is supposed capable of lightnings, and out of the grime is expected the thunderbolt. The splendid name of the cloud is given to this poor local vesture of decay; no use or custom seems sufficient to make the London sky of mechanical suspension familiar to the citizen; when he faces it at the end of a brief distance he calls it by the names proper to the celestial heights, and he is hardly convinced of the truth when he sees it walk his streets.

But, indeed, he might have learned long ago that there is no life in his storm, and that when thunder comes it wears a different gloom. The worst is that with the authentic darkness of cloud comes so often the imitation, and a town tempest is not only mocked, but hidden and covered, by the pother of mere smoke, so that the citizen does not well learn to distinguish. But he who has ever really known the cloud will not make that ignominious confusion. He knows the difference in storm, and so much more the greater difference in sunshine; he will not call by the name of cloud a thing that shows the dark shadow grimly enough, but never the light sweetly, and is naturally incapable of white.

And yet the artificial climate of London is at its best when it is very obvious, and when it has strong scenes of sunset or storm to deal with. The time when it is insufferable is noonday or full afternoon on a cloudless day in summer, when there is not wind enough to drift it, helpless, out of town, and when it is not thick enough to keep the sun away. It makes the sunshine ugly. No beauty, even artificial or obvious, belongs to the smoke then, and it plays no antic pranks in mimicry of cloud. It has no shadow and no menace; it has no opportunity for stage-plays; it is disconcerted, and cannot make a penny theatre of its London. Every one must know such days, of which the essence should have been their purity, plain and splendid. By their light is the smoke seen to be nothing in the world but a sorry smirch. The horizon is thickened with it, and there it wreaks its chief 'effects,' but all near things are also oppressed by it; the spirit of the sunshine is gone, and a blazing sun upon miles of blue slate roofs and yellow houses, with the thin uncleanness of smoke just showing in the blaze, is actually that impossibility—sunshine without beauty.

After this, let us grant the smoke the tragi-comedy of its successes. These are generally connected with Westminster; it finds matter fitted to its manner in the surrounding architecture, and in the westward opening. It suppresses a great deal that

UTILITARIAN LONDON.

is not very presentable, on the working side of the river, and it reveals what is Gothic on the other bank. It has a trick of being ashamed of its origin, for it hustles the long chimneys out of sight. It does really surprising things with the beautiful dome of St. Paul's; the very formlessness of its presence seems to give more value to that fine form. It has a way of showing the noble tops of clouds while it loses their bases in vagueness, which is not without beauty. You cannot see from what heavenly ranges of highlands those summits tower, and if they stand into the sunshine their isolation is the more remote and splendid. But even this is but a handy bit of scene-shifting; it touches no more than the fancy.

There is another effect of the London climate, besides the effect of sky scenery, and that is the local colour wherewith the characteristic smoke, mingled with a little rain to make a general water-colour, has painted the surfaces of the town in variants of black. The citizen who—unaware of such things as the quarter of the wind—takes his umbrella for fear of the thunderous look of a tremendous smoke-storm to leeward, is apt to take the touch of soot for the touch of time. Nevertheless, the two dark colours are quite unlike; time is browner, and has a depth in the tone, whereas soot is greyer, and at its blackest has no depth. It gives a shallow colour; and even those who love their sky streaked and tumbled into the chaos of smoke should not be allowed to defend the *aquarelle* that colours their buildings.

It is true that we no longer offer columns of the Doric order for treatment by London water-colours; but all the Doric columns we already have are left subject to this extraordinary substitute for the colouring of a Laconic sun. We have discovered that terra-cotta and tiles resist the work of the climate, and no doubt London at a glance presents a less coal-blackened face than it once wore. But too much of the surface of London is still the work of that dashing impressionist, the climate.

THE TREES

THE high trees that stand stirring and thrilling in the squares in summer do taste of darkness; night drives home a thousand shadows — thin and subtle flocks — to fold within the iron railings and to shelter in corners of the worn and unfragrant grass till morning. But the single trees that have their roots under grey pavements, and that breathe in the little accidental standing-places of the wayside, the railed-in corners left by the chance-medley of London streets—these have the strange fate to be in perpetual light. They never are washed in darkness; they never withdraw into that state and condition of freedom, into that open hiding-place, that untravelled liberty, that wild seclusion at home, that refuge without flight, that secret unconcealed, that solitude unenclosed, that manumission of captives, that opportunity of Penelope—darkness.

The leaves of the street-side tree flutter bright emerald green through the whole night (out of town the discolouring night) of leafy summer. That local colour is never quenched, as human blushes are quenched at night. It rather takes a more conspicuous quality, under the closeness of the electric light; it is sharply green. Whereas the day has its mists and veils, and may at times darken a tree nearly black, by setting the sky alight behind it, the night has none of these shadows. The light of night is stationary and unchangeable, and there are some solitary trees here and there that undergo the unshifting illumination at the closest quarters; the light that knows no hours and makes no journey gleams near upon the motion of the leaves and glosses their faces. It is beforehand with the twilight, so that the dusk when it comes finds the place taken, and it will not let the tree go until the light of day flows in fully, and dawn is over.

The sharp green of the plane-tree is never covered, nor are the delicately sprinkled spots of the poplar-leaves mingled and massed, in these solitary citizen trees. It is

KENSINGTON GARDENS.

in the avenues and glades of Kensington Gardens that Night has her way. There amends are made for the common day by a double mystery. Not a tree is so much as to be known by name; all kinds sigh together in the dark. The mass is sombre and alive, but betrays neither leaf nor colour. As violently as the spirit of the woods was driven away, through all the long daylight, by the sound, the breath, the blackness, and the stamp and seal of London, which permit nothing visible—not a blade of grass—to go unmarked by the proprietorship of this despotic city; so swiftly as the spirit of the woods was hooted and stared into banishment by day, so quickly, so intently, and in such a union of multitude does it softly return by night. Solitude comes, the movement of the forest comes, and remoteness, which by day must be sought where it abides, comes at a stride to London, and sits in the branches of the trees. Profound is the forest and august the sky whence the great and melancholy spirit of the woods comes to restore these daily altered elms.

Look but at the avenue of the Broad Walk at night, as it is seen from its northern gate. Some midsummer daylight hovers up the sky, but the coolness and purity of subtle light are subtly mixed with the thin brown that is the colour of London. A narrow space of this sombre and delicate sky lies straight between the two masses of the trees, and they are unmarked, unbroken, by any single branch or twig astray. The symmetry is absolute; the wide pathway is one faint grey from foreground to distance. Close to you, two sentinel trees, one on either hand, hold the gateway of the majestic avenue, and these only are green, on these only shines the gaslight of the road. These two are among those London trees that never bathe in darkness. You can see their branches and their leaves, their soft encounters with the night-winds, and their articulate composure; but you see none of such things in the high and dark mass beyond, standing also precisely to the right, and precisely to the left.

By day it is a London avenue, and the grass and gravel are, as it were, disowned by Nature; but now this rigid pattern of a landscape is visibly in the heart and centre of Nature and Night. No pilgrimage of days can take a traveller further than the places he is rapt to by a pause, at night, where distance and dreams themselves have made the journey.

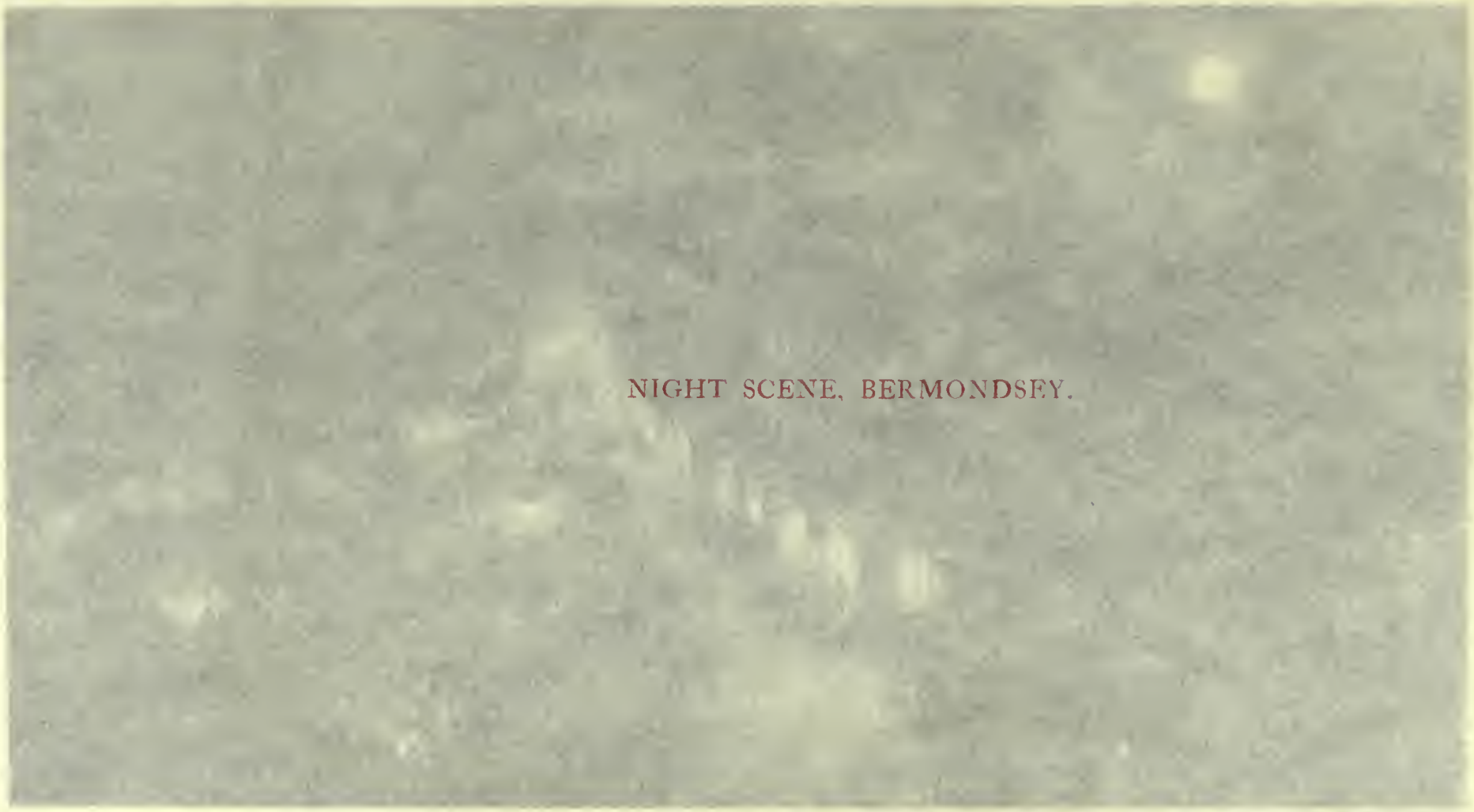
Or seek the trees earlier in the night; for the trees of Kensington Gardens are not deprived of the delicate dusk, though the first twilight has too much of day in it, and the touching restoration does not begin until the paths are vague and colour is absorbed and effaced by the influence of the local sky. London passes away from the trees while the June north-west is still luminous, but barely luminous, and going out so fast that to watching eyes it seems to flash softly while it darkens, as though summer lightning were at play under the horizon; then the tender leaves of penetrable trees, lightly apart in the tree-tops, let showering glimpses of sky go through.

If, on the other hand, you turn your own face from the bright regions and take the leaves with the north-west upon them, on no apple-trees in orchards, and on no olives in the south, does the subsiding evening look more sweetly. All is forgotten except the cool ablution of evening upon the separate leaves.

Or if there is an early moon, she is as sovereign a restorative as the dark itself. She touches the high places of avenues within sound of the London wheels, and they become as simple as tree-tops at Verona. But, indeed, the moon is plainly seen to bring this dignity and liberty from the simple skies. All the world knows her to be like that lady of the poets who spoke to none that was not worthy, because before she talked with men she 'knighted them with her smile.' It is one of the tyrannies wreaked by the electric light and the gas-lamps upon the street-side tree that they keep away from it the glimpses of the moon. Not only is secret darkness forbidden, but the secret light is quenched. The tree waves softly all night in the unaltering lamplight, and the moonlight is killed upon its leaves.

As to these lights of London lamps, their beauty, which is so great, seems to depend almost entirely upon the sky. See them as they glow in the long unequal curves that follow the subtly misleading directions of the streets of London, and in all their brilliancy they make but a common show—pretty enough, but not beautiful. But let any lamp or line of lamps come into visible relation with the sky—any sky, whether a mysterious night-sky softly embrowned, or a night-sky swept pure by a west wind, or the most ordinary grey of any average evening—and the lamp has indescribable beauties. I have seen a grey blue sky at the earliest moment when street lamps were alight at all, and radiant against the light grey of its invisible and equal clouds an electric lamp has been reared: an electric lamp of cold white light, pure and keen, and armed with intense and splendid arrows that would pierce day itself. Light grey sky and thrilling lamp together make—or so it seems to me—one of the most beautiful sights that eyes can see—the most refined, most severe, and most exquisite. This carbon electric light is so much disliked because, no doubt, it was generally seen under the glass and iron of a railway station. Seen with the sky it cannot but be seen to be most beautiful. The golden lights—electric lamps or gas lamps—have the beauty of fire, but the white lamp has the beauty of light. The golden, too, however, cannot be seen at their best but in one picture with the sky.

London at night has begun, of late, so to multiply her lights that they make all her scenery. A search-light suddenly draws the eye up to the chimney-pots (sweetly touched, they too, on the westernmost of their squalid sides) and to the unbroken sky; and then at once the eye travels down its shaft, revealing clouded air; and here a puff of steam from some machine at work on the new underground railway takes colour on its curves. Or the search-light makes the programme of a music-hall to shine black and white upon the wall; anon, an advertisement is written in light,



NIGHT SCENE, BERMONDSEY.

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and perpetually among the even progress of the carriage lights flit the lamps of bicycles. And if, from a heart of glowing lights, you look into the streets, you find them so filled with blue air that there is evident blue between you and the houses opposite.

The street-corner tree has always the golden gas and the blue air; upon it rains a sky that is not seen to darken for rain, and you hear the drops, silent elsewhere, upon its open leaves.

CHELSEA REACH

The worst of all reasons for continuing anything is that it is easily continuable. The Houses of Parliament have an air as though you could take them on along the river towards Chelsea without any necessity for stopping. But that very suggestion prompts its own refusal. No man would hold this characteristic to be one that makes for the beauty of a design; what there is of a really fine building never prompted the wish that it were to be prolonged. And although an embanking wall is not the same thing as a building, yet of even an embankment it may be said that the fact that it is already very long is at any rate a poor reason for making it longer. When the thing is not altogether admirable, it would be hard to urge a better reason for making no more of it. This is worth saying in consideration of a recent measure of improvement directed against the last bit left of the Chelsea foreshore. The measure was urged on the plea of uniformity, which obviously has reference to the beauty of the bank. Therefore when the protesters against the change were accused—as doubtless they were—of opposing it for reasons of sentiment, they might well answer that the County Council also has reasons of sentiment. '*Le cœur a ses raisons!*' The feeling for uniformity is a sentiment, like another. While, then, uniformity is one of the 'reasons of the heart' of a County Council, the inhabitants of Cheyne Walk are free to press reasons of their own hearts.

The Embankment stops short at its westward end, in the course of Cheyne Walk, just below the place where the river leaves a little bend which is an inlet, an incident, of the long Reach. Call the curve a gulf, and this is a little bay within it. The bay is a small, forgotten, abiding, unremarked shore, with a great deal of modern London not only below it, but above it, on its further side—that is, between it and the vaguest beginnings of the country. Nevertheless, it is not modern at all. It looks like the overlooked little bits of cottage, tiled cottage-roof, and cottage front-garden, that are to be seen forgotten in the roaring streets of Fulham—true bits of village in the depths of town. But in any case it is to go, even though the gulf is saved. Let us say at once that there may be two intelligible opinions as to the Embankment at Westminster and Charing Cross. There is something due to the worldly dignity of a great city. The distinction of London was once that it was

THE CLOCK TOWER, WESTMINSTER.

THE CLOCK TOWER, WESTMINSTER

not a great city but a great village. It was a little town, widespread; and until the raising of some of the best of the new buildings on the left bank, there was nothing conspicuously fine to contradict the village character except Somerset House. The great stations and the busy Gothic of the Houses of Parliament were not influential enough for this. Now, however, it is somewhat different. Two buildings at least in the line of new hotels and offices seem good enough to make rules. They are not of the dignity of Somerset House, but they will serve. For a space, then, where they stand, the village-London is done away. And only for a village-London, a London keeping its own distinctive character, would a broken, accidental, muddy shore, with its tidal rhythm of mud and wave, be fit. This left bank at least is, for a space, *grande ville*. We cannot altogether grudge its Embankment.

But if there is a mile of London village left—and therefore of the most London-like London—it is at Chelsea. The reason of the County Council's heart, even, ought to confess thus much. And the village-character is in its vitality on the curving foreshore of this long Reach. A great part of the district near is a village of yesterday, and mean enough, but the river-side of wharf and barge and tidal change is a village river-side of long ago. It is lowly enough, not mean at all. It is the scene of business as old as civilisation; man-power and horse-power, and the movement of wind and water, seem to do the greater part of the work among them. It is the counterpart of spade cultivation on the Jersey *coteaux*, though this is all river and that all earth; but both are simple. The chimneys on the right bank are a long way off, the gasworks higher up are out of sight. You can forget the great bridges down stream; and looking towards the light the view is animating.

Inasmuch as the Thames flows here north-eastward, when you look to the south-west by Chelsea Reach, in the early afternoon of windy spring, you look at once towards the gates of light, the gates of the wind, and the gates of the river. There seems to be one sole spring and source in the day. The way is, beyond description, open. For the waterway is the flat of the world, and everywhere else in London are houses; here is a real horizon. Here you get the proportions of a great sky, as you get the proportions of a great church when there are no benches on the floor to shorten them. The clouds come upon the south-west wind of the early year, a little cold with the strength of freshness, and not with chill, and give and withhold a hundred lights.

Those who do not like the name of mud should see how these lights are answered by the floor of mud in simple silver and steel. Twice a day the motion of the wave is there, twice a day the still shore. With that cradling change go the changes of the boats and barges at the wharves. All is life, but there is no colour, except where you very dimly perceive that a sail is red as the sails are on the Adriatic. It is a view to teach painting, to teach seeing. We have not such another school in London as Chelsea Reach. If Chelsea ever becomes *grande ville* too, the shape of

the river will be altered, and the profile of that curve, sharp and fine with masts against the west will be abolished: there will be no beauty of tides, no silver wet mirror, no barges.

There is nothing quite like Chelsea. The spoiling of Chelsea will not be the same thing as the spoiling of the country by pushing on a suburb, for instance; for in that case there is country beyond, only deferred. But there is no Cheyne Walk, no Chelsea, further up the river, or anywhere in the world of rivers.

ST. PAUL'S AT DAWN.

ST. LOUIS AT DAWN

The Last Boat

THE SPRING

THERE is a splendid spring in town, and it happens to agree with the country spring as to the time of appearing; but it is another show, and of another spirit. The difference is curiously complete; it was, no doubt, to be looked for in the avenues, in the sward, in the winding water, and in the Park generally, considered as a landscape. But how is the grass itself London grass? Not only in its acre of intense green, but in the space of a square foot that might, one would think, be anywhere, it is London grass. The leaves, the blades, are London growth. You cannot evade the spirit of place by shutting out the sky, the railings, the people, or the gravel. Even if you go close and make acquaintance, as a child does, with the roots, you are aware that it is not the grass of England that you have there, but the grass of London.

The leaves of the trees have so vulgar a contrast in the black of stems, branches, and twigs, that they are from the first obviously not the leaves of the woods. They are all the better admired by many eyes, for whom the modest contrasts of nature are not enough; and you may hear the black and green of the parks praised for this same immoderate effect of colour. But the grass has nothing to tell that tale of the London winter which the branch tells; it is this year's; it has no past; it is innocent, and answerable to the sun for merely its few inches of simple green. It might be supposed to have the graces of an alien in London. But it has them not at all; it comes up a Londoner. You cannot be really intimate with it; and when it puts up its little flower, and your child brings it home to you hot from a clenched hand, even then it has nothing, nothing whatever, of the fields. You put it into water to flatter the child, but even there, given by that little alien hand, and so isolated from its park and its railings, it is unmistakably the grass of its own soil; it manifestly could never have been romping with little young dandelions on the side of a village road, or tossed by visiting winds scented with meadows.

The London spring is a good thing, but it is another thing. It is only because of the accident by which the real spring and the London spring appear at the same time of the year that they have come to bear the same name, and even to be confused together by the insensitive. A handful from the hedgerows twenty miles away—a handful, already half faded, of mingled things at random, grass and herbs, not free from traces of white and warm rustic dust—an authentic little heap from the real spring, would show at once to all apprehensive eyes what the difference really is. And yet there must be careless or worldly birds that do not know it. Otherwise we should not hear such songs from the remotest river-sides sung within Kensington Gardens. Let no one pretend, however, that the bees are deceived or indifferent.

Nor let it be said that the difference is superficial. That is precisely untrue; it is the likeness that is superficial, and the difference essential. The London spring is a brilliant image of the real spring. It is fresh when the real April is fresh; and when it grows dim you could match it with specimens from the country wayside. Nay, soot and smoke themselves cannot disguise the real spring growth and make it look like the London. That can easily be proved. After two weeks in which you are unconvinced of May by the green and dazzling parks, you will get the very thrill of May from a square yard of very young nettles and young weeds of many kinds, seen from a railway carriage and touched with the railway dust. There is cleaner grass by the Speke Monument, but this that grows by the railway is out of town; it is of another kind; it is of the other spring. Somewhere, past the suburbs, the London spring had its frontier, and, this past, the sun and the sap dawned and rose with sudden authority, and spring was real.

Knowing how intimate is the sense of smell, one might think that the absence of the scent of the earth might account for all the deep difference of London. But it is not so; for you know the real spring by mere sight. Still, the lack of that fragrance is much. The earth is home, and the scent of it is the scent of infancy and home. Childhood knows it better than does the ploughman following the new furrow. Childhood has had it so near, and has learned it once for all, and will never be deceived, nor will the man who has had a childhood near living earth; he knows that the springs are two. He knows, for he remembers that he knew, the spirit of the place. That is an *aura* that lies near the ground. It is a warm atmosphere that does not rise, but breathes by little garden plots in corners; is the very spirit of rivulets and brooks; lurks amongst the maiden-hair that covers the fresh waters of Mediterranean hillsides, and amongst the gravel of old sunny garden terraces; is so caught in moss that the air where moss grows seems to imprison it; and passes quick into the nostrils of young children. All low-growing flowers—ground-ivy, and things that are not so tall as grass—are entangled with the spirit of place. Low box hedges are intricate with it, and with the spirit of antiquity, because they are no higher than the heads of very little children, whose hearts conceive antiquity and the genius of places. They

WATERLOO BRIDGE.

know the breath of the parks well. What children know—what they knew—we have never forgotten. And yet all the differences which they learned—the difference between the weak odour of soot and the gentle odour of earth, and the difference between the click of the bit and the sound of the bee—are not the real difference between the town spring and the spring of the natural world. They are mere signs and proofs; the fact lies deep and close; there are two springs.

And yet, across all boundaries, across the frontier of the suburbs, what is this strange scrap of the real May of the natural world dropped into the midst of the May of London? A scrap of that true spring alighted in the midst of the very winter would hardly look so strange as this shred of the very spring in the spring of town. It is but some accidental grass or leaf that has been shed and sown by some west wind upon the edges of the tiles of a little old poor roof in town. Not into the parks did it fly, not amongst the flower-walks or on the great sward, emerald green. It hovered and flitted into the middle of town, a little flock of wild lives. The enormous spring, the May of all the earth, unmarked, disguised by a delusive likeness to the London spring, has visited the town. It is a dainty *incognito*. It signals to those who know; but if Vestries recognised it—and supposing they cared enough for roofs of that kind, which they do not—they would take that grass up by the roots.

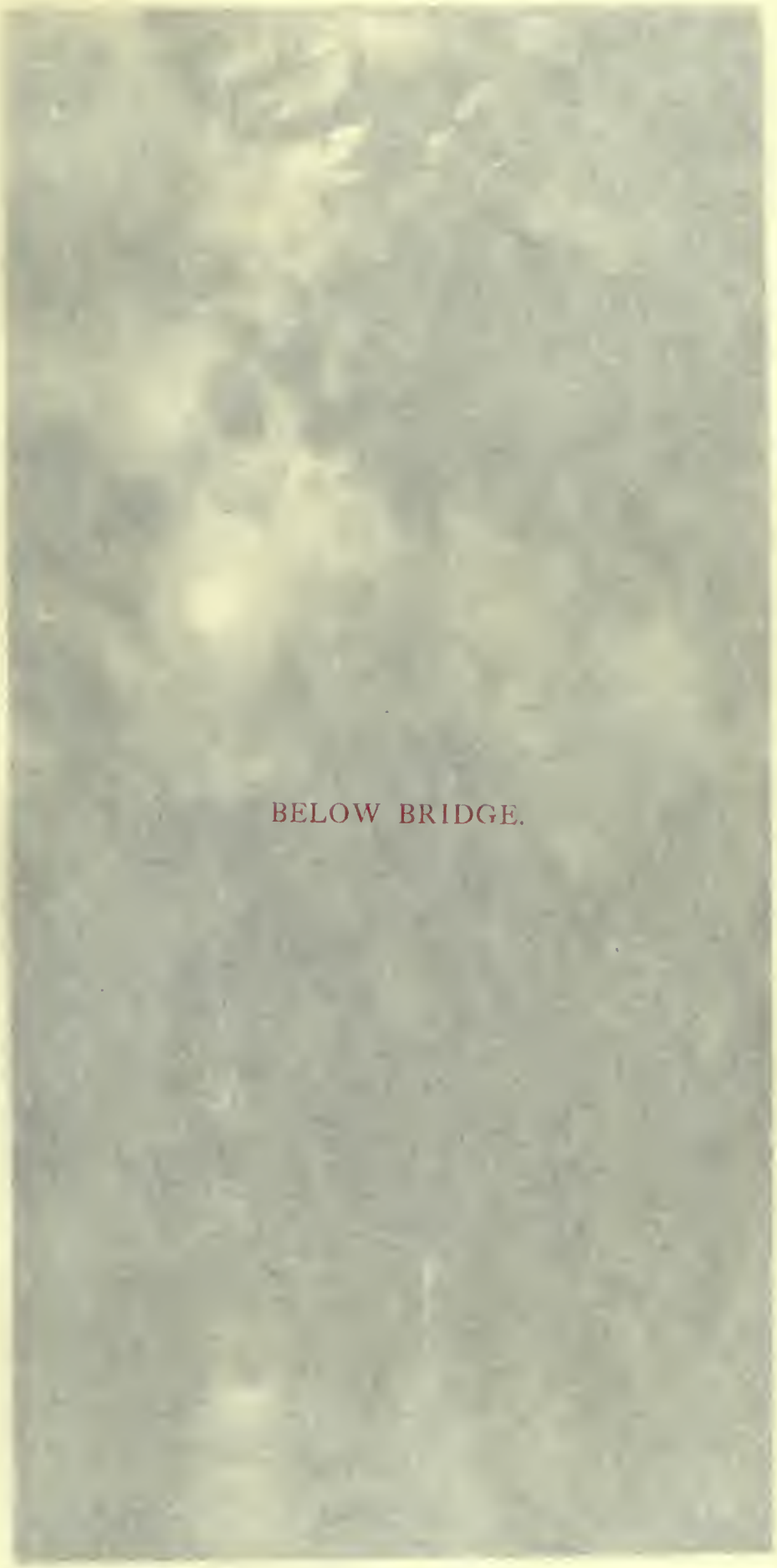
BELOW BRIDGE

The first impression, and, needless to say, the longest, is that of the many miles of wharves compared with the few miles of embankments, drives, and of the holiday river generally. Not only have the black and brown warehouses, the chimneys, and the cranes possession of the whole right bank of the London Thames, but they hold both banks of the lower Thames through league-long reaches and noble curves, and such changes of aspect, sky, and direction as renew the scene by the rule of the sky.

Below Bridge.

Besides this slow variation of light, in which the view wheels under the wheeling cloud, there is no lack of variety along the dusky banks of the river of commerce. The subsidence of height along the warehouses as the river draws further and further from the middle of London is an incident of continuous interest, interrupted now and then, but holding on persistently, until the carrying river flows through a dark-gabled, low, and long village towards the eastern woods and heights and the further fields.

Of really old buildings, wooden and small, and in any conventional sense interesting, there is little indeed, but such as it is it takes the eye instantly. Looking along the swarthy, unequal frontage of brick houses that are no houses—somewhat as the *biblia abiblia* of Charles Lamb are among books,—you find the face of a single human little house, its timber looking old, delicate, and pale among the bricks; a Limehouse harbour-master's title is written across the face, and it is in fact dwelt in—propped in the serried row



BELOW BRIDGE.

that has the sightless aspect of a barn. There is therefore almost nothing of what used to be called the picturesque. Nevertheless, the whole continuous line has far more approach to beauty than any street of 'handsome' houses with columns and porticoes in the whole of western London; moreover, it is much finer than Regent Street. For the form of the normal warehouse is anything but bad; there is a good deal of plain wall, which—unless a building be in every way wrong—gives dignity; the windows are not too many, and for a mile at once the general repeated form is that of a single gable and a flat front. With this you cannot have anything entirely corrupt.

True, now and then there is a region or tract of buildings—'works,' these seem to be, not warehouses—that touch the extremity of possible ugliness and dreariness, and are flat-roofed, rectangular, and, without exaggeration, black. These are very few—two or three at the most—and all on the right bank. Otherwise the skyline of buildings is low, broken, pointed, and very various.

Low as it is, it *is* always—seen from the deck of a boat—the very skyline. From that low point of view the scene is made of river and boats, warehouses, and sky. Of the thronging town beyond, on either bank, nothing appears; you have got rid of streets, and, with streets, of all the movement, the rattle, the people, the inland perspectives. The face of river-side buildings looks almost unbroken; it lets no glimpse pass through. There might be marshes or fields beyond; it is only by the map that you know these two dark banks to be the edges and hems of cities.

The swarthiness, the darkness of the colour—a brownish grey—is to be insisted upon; yet to none but a careless eye does the lower Thames seem all brown and grey. The dull hues are shot with one single prevailing colour—red. Innumerable red-tiled roofs are seen as the turn of the river shows their dusky sides; iron sheds are ruddled with the red that signs flocks of country sheep; shutters are red over warehouse windows (this is a Sunday view), and everywhere are the red sails of Venice, dyed in the self-same dye, only differently lighted. Even when there is a difficulty in fixing the place of this negroid blush, it is perceptibly there. It is latent, even when no red sail rises between grey water and grey sky; it lurks in hollows and inlets so darkly as to be almost black. Then suddenly the scarlet of a huge black and scarlet steamer comes along and gives you the colour without a shred of mystery, without charm, and with the most definite division. Besides the red, there is nothing that is coloured except a stack of timber now and then—raw wood with precisely the colours of a wheatfield in August—and the piled-up hay of a red-sailed barge loaded down to the water. These are not many on the Sunday river, but Sunday clears the colours by clearing the air. There is exceedingly little smoke; its sign is upon the whole river-side, it has re-drawn everything in black, as a child might go over a water-colour with his black pencils, but between you and the natural clouds there is nothing but fresh air, quick with the movement that seems perpetually to follow this grey waterway. Or now and then, at long intervals, a single flimsy puff of smoke comes between mast and sky; it is brown,

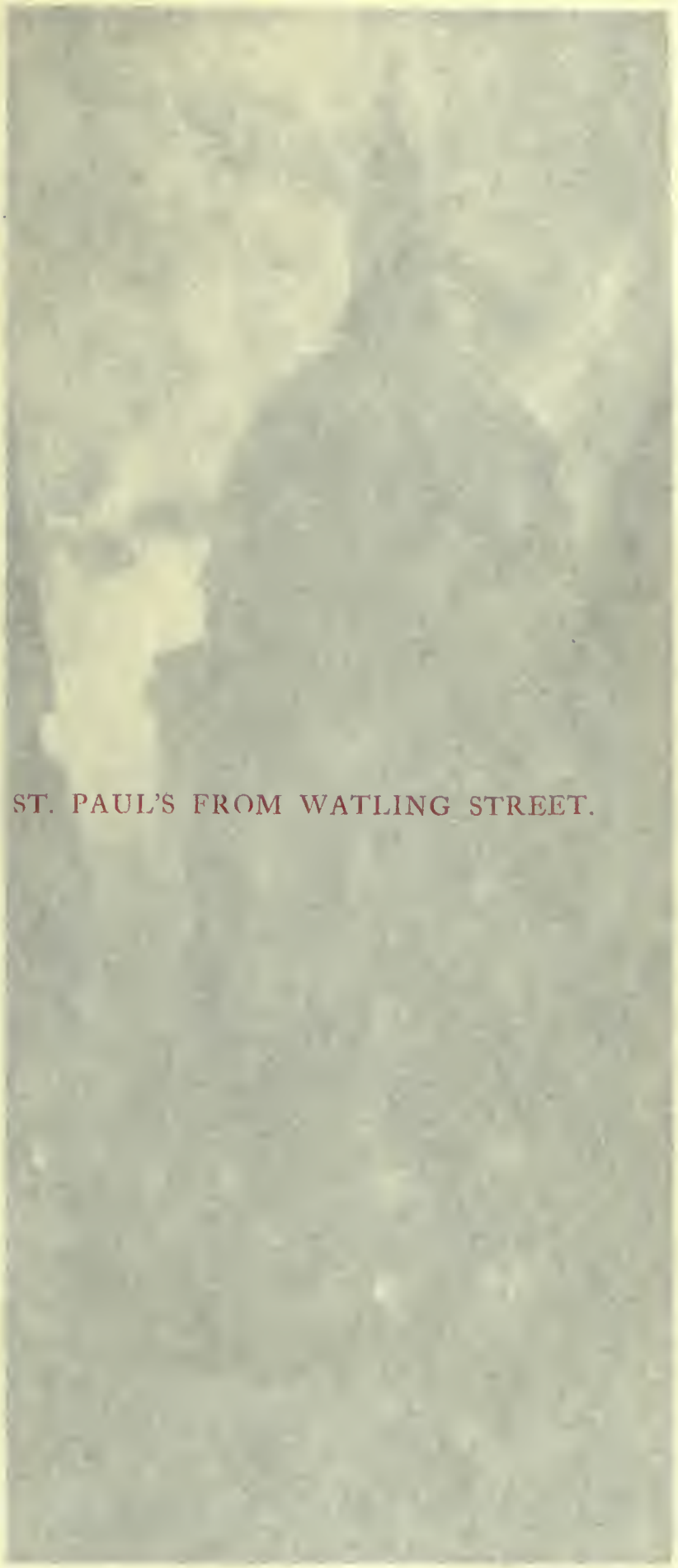
the steam is white, and the cloud silver grey; and through each of these three with a various gleam filters the flying sunshine.

Sunday seals the faces of the barns and turns the key upon the leagues of wharves; but it leaves all the cranes and masts etched in their thousands upon the low horizon. These make the thicket of the Thames-side, a deciduous, narrow wood winding east, south-east, and north, and standing everywhere in its brief winter of a day, having shed sails and burdens and put away noise. There is nothing in the handsome London of high houses so delicate as these lifted lances against the sky. Hop-gardens or vineyards, or the slender rows of sticks that carry pea plants and beans in rustic gardens, make the same play with light, and let it through as fine a design.

Here is nothing of the sharp black and white detail that is the most salient thing in London streets; everything is painted softly; all the darks are dull; in a word, the scene is simple, and this the streets are never. It is simplicity, indeed, that makes all the buildings (except only the 'works' above mentioned) more than tolerable. There are no advertisements. This means much to eyes too well used to those shreds and tatters of the wall. That commerce which makes so much paltry show in the West is here perfectly grave and quiet; it makes serious announcements, not advertisements, of the things that occupy navies. You see 'Pickles' and other names that launch a thousand ships, written large over various landing-places, and the names of the owners of warehouses are broad across their fronts; or you are reminded how little you know of the affairs of the place by the frequent name of 'Sufferance Wharf' among the cranes. It cannot possibly be said that this lettering is beautiful, but it is not nearly so bad as the lettering in the streets we know. Needless to say, you shall not see a scrap of gilding below bridge, except a momentary tawdriness near the pier of some excursion place, where there are unseen Cockney gardens at hand—no gilding, nor white, nor any kind of blue. Seeing that bad blue is the worst thing in the far-off town of paint and pleasure, the dark and reddish river-side of work has here again one of its obscure advantages.

A Back Street

The work, almost all pausing in this summer



ST. PAUL'S FROM WATLING STREET.

Sunday, is obviously, to judge by its instruments and chips, mainly the inhuman work of machines. Nevertheless, wherever there are boats there is that arm of Hercules which is heroic, and therefore greater, though much weaker, than the arm of iron; and even on this day you may see the toil of the arm against the mass of the heavy river, as two men stand to row their broad barge up stream. It is the most primitive contest after all. Their figures strain back on the long oar until they are stretched nearly straight horizontally before they slowly gather themselves and grow erect again. Nothing suits the river so well as the barge with its level load, flat as the water itself. Nothing a-tiptoe there; but the very surface of the world reaching to the sea, and the long river feeling for that level far inland.

The dusky voyage darkens, for the Thames turns towards the north; anon it takes a pale grey splendour, the sky shines, and the delicate intricacy of masts that mar nothing of the simple view seems to be rather itself luminous than dark against the light; flying birds are lost as they pass in the upper brilliance. It is but that the Thames has swung towards the south again.

THE ROADS

On Westminster Bridge at early morning Wordsworth thought of the heart of London, but a view of London in the long day and night of movement, when the mystery of sleep is away, suggests not the involuntary heart of men, but their wilful feet. The roads, which are lonely messengers in the far-off country, crowd together here, and hustle one another to give footing to the tramp of the people. London has a fantastic look, as though there were nothing to do but make haste to be gone. To look at London from some point of height—a rare opportunity—is to trace these ways of passionate escape. The roads, indeed, seem eager, but you know that the crowds who, by these curves and knots, these straight lines, and these intent, narrow, dark grey levels, traced with narrower steel, elude the town, are in no more than jog-trot haste, and wear no look of fugitives. Of them and of their detail there is no sign in this distant prospect. The movement of the people in London is here no more perceptible than the molecular motion in a diamond.

A Coffee Stall

But the roads are all expressive of this energy of flight from a centre. They are, as it were, signs of a perpetual explosion; they are the fringe of the *mêlée*, the shooting, streaming outbreaks of the photosphere of London. They hunt and are hunted. They fly from the city of confusion. It is only by escaping that they become visible, and out of the uncertainty of the smoke the hasty roads clear themselves as they make for light and the open ground. It seems as though the steady strength of their curves did in itself express some force and impulse. The railways run; their foreshortened sweeps and reaches look like the swinging and swaying of resolute motion. The town would shoulder them, but they evade and slip through, slender and keen,

with a stroke of their flying heels. They crawl, but they crawl with the dominant level and liberty of flight in air.

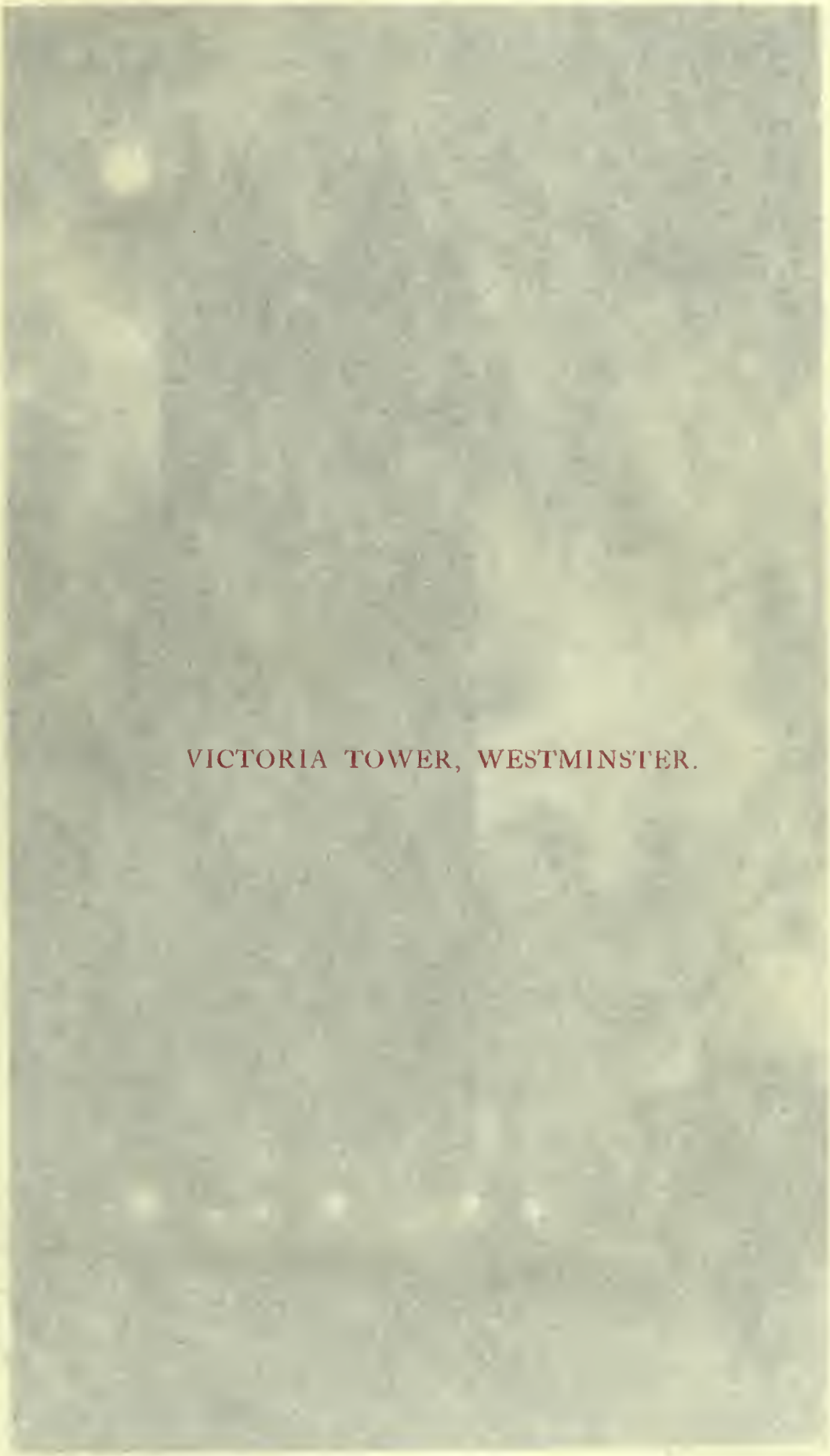
They begin in the tangle of the town, but smoothly untie themselves and pass away single and swift. No other road looks so resolute in flight as the rail. The others jostle one another as they hurry from town, and must needs relax their cagerness in order to climb the hills—brief and little ones though these are. The roads pause on the mounds, they hesitate at crossways, and they dip into slight and shallow valleys, whence they do not see the riot of walls and roofs from out of which they go.

The azure June hardly leaves a trace of the local grey of smoke. All, by some accident of aspect, is a vague blue, although the smoke, seen from the Greenwich heights, leaves nothing unveiled, cancels the horizon, and barely lets the lovely dome of St. Paul's show a dark blue form upon the close background of thick and sunny air. And blue, like the rest, is that one wide road which takes here so majestic a sweep —the river. It is the river of chimneys; they stand, on either bank, as unequal in growth as a group of children; they crowd together, they stand apart, they straggle, but if they have any law, it is the river's. They mark its path as reeds and rushes might do in meadows. The hidden reaches are traced by this black growth, followed and discovered. The chimneys will hardly let the river go, but cling to the track of his waters when the town is dwindling eastwards, and stand conspicuous among the flats when the houses have at last, at last, ceased. Apart from the river they are almost as rare in London as in Naples, and it is not to them we owe the chief part of our 'sky,' but to the steamers, to the trains, and, more than all, to the unnumbered houses. If ever London is to be restored to her own mists—not to great brightness, but to the tender exhalations that are now burlesqued by smoke, to the true climate of nature, the marshes, and the north, it will obviously be the work of laws touching the houses rather than the factories.

The river is perpetually overhung, involved, tangled, in that indefinite and unshapely cloud. It looks blue from the Greenwich hill, but not blue with the blue of pure sunny waters; it is blue because blue is the trick of this midsummer light seen from this one point. The blue road lies open and flat, from the dazzling confusion of the west, whence it comes, to the dimmer confusion of the north, whither the great curve tends. It is a road more level than the tyrannously level rails, but there is no haste in it. The unceasing motion of the tidal Thames seems to make it wait about the bridges of London. The accustomed versifier himself will hardly bid it flow on, so often is it seen to flow back. Because it is so constantly chidden and driven by the sea, the long tendency, brought from its first source and kept between so many fields and over all the noisy weirs, is concealed. That flowing lurks still, but you cannot find it among the rhythmic tides. It is not expressed, and there is no sense of the final sea in the coming and going of these turbid waters. The unceasing seaward flow is their secret.

But it is only upon this ambiguous road of the river that any human motion is perceptible in this distant view. Barges are seen to float heavy and flat, and at certain points there is the vague suggestion of some stir at wharf or pier. Otherwise the scene keeps all its hurry out of sight and hearing. But for the vague shifting and alteration of the light, London might be a painted city. The little figure of man is so quenched, incredibly. His town keeps the black crowds and their voices out of reach, and it is difficult to believe in the noise, so deaf is the distance.

London is at the mercy of her roads, and it is no wonder the fancy should give them life. And now it is for their coming, not their going, that they seem in haste. The town has covered up the original and all-fruitful earth; her pavements seal up all the springs of earthly life, and her roads are loaded with the fruits of earth unsealed. It is upon her, then, that the roads are turned with boat, train, and cart charged with her bread. What flocks and herds are daily hunted into the unproductive town, the town wherefrom nothing, nothing—for all its factories—takes birth; the town that visibly burns up, with never-ceasing reek of the never-ceasing burning, the substance of the world. The flame of life is fed fully in a thousand forms, and the flame of fire, smouldering in the furnaces at the foot of these chimneys, is the sign of the enormous sacrifice.



VICTORIA TOWER, WESTMINSTER.

THE SMOULDERING CITY

Because the town covers her fires, sits darkling in her daily and nightly burning, and sequesters flame from flame in a thousand thousand little chambers of their own, there is but small show of the perpetual devouring whereby fire abides among men as a long companion. Ariel of a hotter name and of a wilder element, willing and brief, delicate and eager, quick to finish and be gone, a hasty servant, is fire the mere visitant, unused to these long hours. But fire in London never escapes. It is bound in perpetual business, and if it flashes away for a moment it is recaptured in another flash, and if it slips away under cover of ashes it is overtaken and bound to the task again. Man, then, willingly pays the wages of such a wildness in servitude, and spends mines and forests to keep the mobile creature close within his gates.

Rain, Smoke and Traffic.

If there is little show of that multitudinous presence, there is a broadcast sign of it. 'No smoke without a fire'; and the sky of London continually betrays her house-mate. It is the flag signalling the presence of the unseen creature; not by colour and brilliance like its own, but by a folding and unfolding of banners of darkness. The quicker and hotter the enclosed fire, the duller is the sign. It is a sign that denies and confesses at once. Not a curl of flame, not a glow of furnace is visible under the hurrying blackness of river-side smoke that hangs house and wall with the grey tokens of invisible and splendid flame. Fire is the blush, and when London shows colour it is the cool red, not the hot.

Such colour has been all alight on many mid-summer evenings. Hardly a town away from

these dark latitudes could show a fresher or fuller flash of dyes. A coloured sky, a coloured sun, coloured cloud, the red of brick softly empurpled, or made rosy, or turned a frolic scarlet, and the green of trees, yet undarkened by the later days of summer—all this stirs and lightens under the soft hurry of a west wind, so that a drive between seven and eight o'clock is a surprise of red and blue. White is wanting —the white surface that would look beautiful in western sunshine. All the white is bad and unfortunate, whether it is the paint of Regent Street or the stucco of suburbs; and where there is no beauty of white there must be much lacking. It is grotesque to find the silly oil-paint gloss of the Quadrant glazing back the tender sun, where one looked for white made luminous. Seldom does the country landscape fail—especially where it is gently populous—to hold up some tempered white to the rosy sun; where there is no chalk or white quarry, or cliff, or white hawthorn-tree or white cherry, there is the welcome whitewash of a cottage wall. London, undecked with its white, and wearing little or no yellow, has nevertheless a choice of these kindling reds of her various bricks; and so decked with the colours of fire she is at her freshest. It is as when you touch the red of a deep cheek and find it cool.

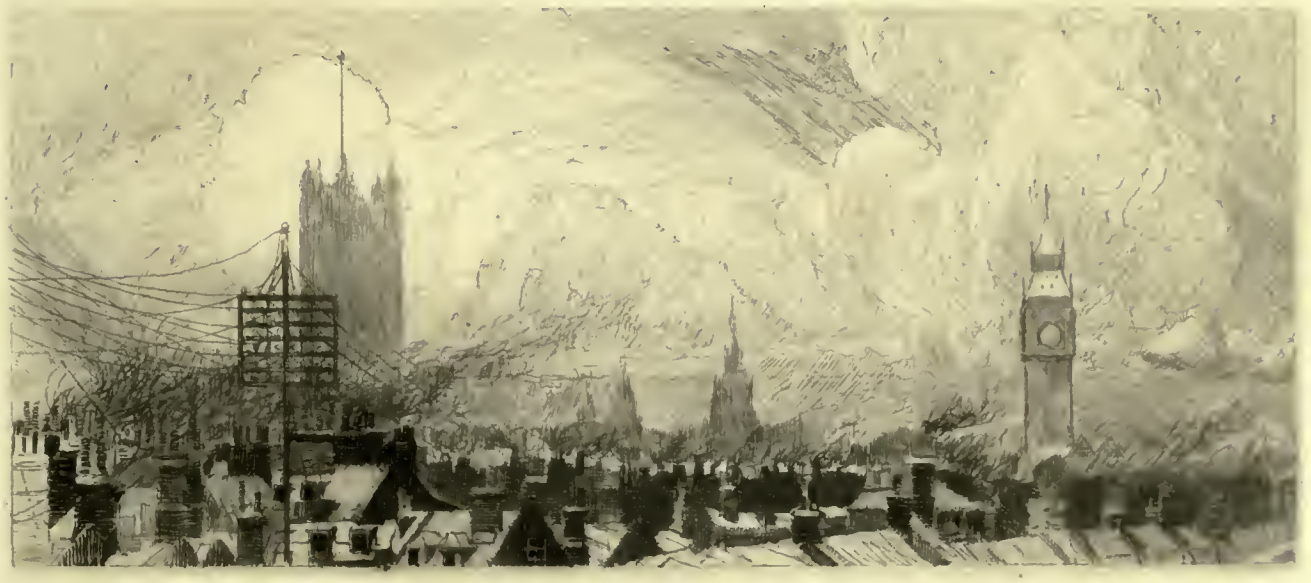
The general fire has no part in the coloured evening; that sunny wind blows the sign of flame away. In the thicket of fire there is no red brick or green tree, or rosy cloud, or any light blue sky. Those who find something to complain of in the rebuilding of the west of London in brick, because the architecture is not everywhere what it should be, are hardly thankful enough for the colour. The builder may build amiss, but he builds with a colour that becomes all our skies, whether grey or bright. One day he will, perhaps, begin a fashion of using much more white, in brick and tile, and the fiery town will look relieved from her suggestion of fever. Ruddy roofs abound in the poorer town, where red walls are absent; they are built up with grey and black, needless to say, in such a manner that their old gables are hidden in square frontages and straight cornices, and their colours made invisible except to a view from above. It is from a high railway that you may see the darkened but still soft and charming colour spreading from roof to roof of the cottage-streets of older London, until it looks —fading eastwards—as though it were itself some effect of a London sunset. That flush almost reaches the regions of the red-hot eastern furnaces hidden coldly under black and grey.

The waters of the Thames could hardly quench so great a multitude of imprisoned flames. Fire is the secret of the Thames itself, lurking as it does in the ships and boats; the black barges are charged to feed it, and the airs that wander with the river fan it to its perpetual work. It is trained within its little shrines, and leaps in chains and captivity, and runs in narrow courses. With its cold ashes and its cold grime, with the burden of its chill refuse, all the remote roads and byways of the town seem to be utterly choked and filled.

When the Great Fire of London came out of its hiding-places and took life in the

air of day, it made ashes of more evident and conspicuous things, but it can hardly have made more ashes and cinders than it makes daily under cover. London is not destroyed again, but it has become the place of immeasurable destruction. Moreover, since the smouldering city is a city of men, the life of men, so multiplied, makes London a very centre of fires insatiable. That life burns within five millions of furnaces. Life feeds itself by fire, but out of London we are accustomed to see it at its consuming work side by side with the signs of unceasing re-creation. Man, woman, and child, sprinkled over the labouring land, are separate flames far apart like the marsh flames of wildfire. Between them graze the sheep, the wheat turns brown, or the apple reddens, and the husbandman's life itself is immediately paid again in labour to the soil. Whereas London visibly works at nothing but transformation.

The delicate fire, that plays and vanishes elsewhere, but cannot vanish in London, has nowhere else so gross and dead a following. Even in the north, where the factory makes a denser cloud, you find the blue close by, and the horizon cleaner, or so it seems. Little distant things on the verge, the lashes of the eyes of earth and sky, are more perceptible than they are in London, even with a west wind. Here the fiery Ariel has no delicate companionship, no one near but Caliban.



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